WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A gaming machine having a processor monitoring real time, comprising:

a basic game controlled by said processor in response to a wager amount and including basic game visual elements, said basic game having a plurality of start-bonus outcomes;

a bonus game controlled by said processor and activated by the occurrence of one of said plurality of start-bonus outcomes, said bonus game including bonus game visual elements displayed while said bonus game is activated; and

a memory device coupled to said processor and storing at least two basic game data sets for producing at least two different types of said basic game visual elements and at least two bonus game data sets for producing at least two different types of said bonus game visual elements, said processor selecting one of said at least two basic game data sets and one of said at least two bonus game data sets in response to said real time being a predetermined time.

2.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said basic game includes a simulated spinning reel display showing a plurality of symbols, said basic game visual elements including at least some of said plurality of symbols.

3.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said bonus game visual elements include a plurality of non-selectable symbols that are independent of a bonus payout from said bonus game.

4.   The gaming machine of claim 3, wherein said plurality of non-selectable symbols are background visual elements.

5.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said bonus game visual elements include a plurality of selectable symbols, said bonus game including a chance for a bonus payout dependent on said plurality of selectable symbols.

6.   The gaming machine of claim 5, wherein said plurality of selectable symbols are selected by a game player on a keyboard.

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7.   The gaming machine of claim 5, wherein said plurality of selectable symbols are selected by said game player via a touch screen.

8.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said predetermined time is at least one day in a calendar year.

9.   The gaming machine of claim 8, wherein said at least one day is a holiday.

10.   The gaming machine of claim 9, wherein said holiday is selected from a group consisting of Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mardi Gras, Easter, the 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day.

11.   The gaming machine of claim 8, wherein said at least one day is a holiday and at least one day before and after said holiday.

12.   The gaming machine of claim 8, wherein one of said at least two different types of said bonus game or basic game visual elements includes animated characters having visual indicia of a holiday motif.

13.   The gaming machine of claim 12, wherein said characters are animated so as to provide movement.

14.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said predetermined time is at least one minute within one day.

15.   The gaming machine of claim 14, wherein said at least one minute includes a plurality of minutes during the nighttime, and one of said at least two different types of said bonus game or basic game visual elements includes characters appearing to be physically exhausted.

16.   The gaming machine of claim 15, wherein said characters are animated so as to provide movement.

17.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said predetermined time is a particular day, and one of said at least two different types of said bonus game or basic game visual elements includes a trivia fact associated with said particular day from a previous year.

18.   The gaming machine of claim 17, wherein said predetermined time is a plurality of times within said particular day, and a different trivia fact is displayed at each of said plurality of times.

19.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said processor selects one of said at least two basic game data sets and one of said at least two bonus game data sets for display after a player has finished a gaming session if said predetermined time occurs during said gaming session.

20.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said bonus game visual elements are also displayed while said bonus game is inactive.

21.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said predetermined time is determined, in part, due to a clock that is internal to said processor.

22.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said memory device further includes at least two audio data sets for producing at least two different types of audio elements, said processor selecting one of said at least two audio data sets in response to the occurrence of said predetermined time that is monitored by said processor.

23.   The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said predetermined time is a day of the calendar year, and one of said at least two different types of said bonus game visual elements includes visual features representative of a season, wherein said season is selected from the group consisting of spring, summer, fall, and winter.

24.   The gaming machine of claim 1, further including a display for displaying said visual elements, said display being selected from the group consisting of dot matrix, CRT, LED, LCD, and electro-luminescent displays.

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25. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said gaming machine is selected from the group consisting of a stand-up slot machine, a sit-down slot machine, a video blackjack machine, and a video poker machine.

26. A gaming machine, comprising:

a processor for randomly selecting one of a plurality of outcomes of said gaming machine in response to a wager amount, said processor monitoring time signals from a clock;

a display for displaying visual elements; and

a memory device coupled to said processor and storing at least two data sets for producing at least two different types of said visual elements, said processor selecting one of said at least two data sets in response to said processor monitoring a time signal corresponding to a predetermined time.

27. The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said predetermined time is a particular day, and said visual elements include a trivia fact associated with said particular day from a previous year.

28. The gaming machine of claim 27, wherein said predetermined time is a plurality of times within said particular day, and a different trivia fact is displayed at each of said plurality of times.

29. The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said display is selected from the group consisting of dot matrix, CRT, LED, LCD, and electro-luminescent displays.

30. The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein one of said at least two different types of visual elements is a standard motif, and another of said at least two different types of visual elements is a holiday motif.

31.   The gaming machine of claim 26, further including an audio speaker for broadcasting audio elements, said memory device storing at least two audio data sets for producing at least two different types of audio elements, said processor selecting one of said at least two audio data sets in response to said processor monitoring said time signal.

32.   The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said visual elements are associated with said plurality of outcomes.

33.   The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said visual elements are unassociated with said plurality of outcomes.

34.   The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said predetermined time is at least one day in a calendar year, said at least one day being a holiday.

35.   The gaming machine of claim 34, wherein said holiday is selected from a group consisting of Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mardi Gras, Easter, the 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day.

36.   The gaming machine of claim 34, wherein said at least one day further includes at least one day before and after said holiday.

37.   The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said visual elements are characters.

38.   The gaming machine of claim 37, wherein said characters are animated.

39.   The gaming machine of claim 26, wherein said clock is internal to said processor.

40.   A gaming machine, comprising:

a processor for randomly selecting one of a plurality of outcomes of said gaming machine in response to a wager amount, said processor monitoring time signals from a clock;

an audio speaker for broadcasting audio elements; and

a memory device coupled to said processor and storing at least two data sets for producing at least two different types of said audio elements, said processor selecting one of said at least two data sets in response to said processor monitoring a time signal corresponding to a predetermined time.

41.   The gaming machine of claim 40, wherein said audio elements are unassociated with said plurality of outcomes.

42.   The gaming machine of claim 40, wherein said audio elements are associated with said plurality of outcomes.

43.   The gaming machine of claim 40, wherein said predetermined time is at least one day in a calendar year, said at least one day being a holiday.

44.   The gaming machine of claim 43, wherein said holiday is selected from a group consisting of Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mardi Gras, Easter, the 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day.

45.   The gaming machine of claim 43, wherein said at least one day further includes at least one day before and after said holiday.

46.   A method of operating a gaming machine, comprising:

displaying a plurality of standard visual elements;

monitoring real time; and

displaying a plurality of modified visual elements in response to said real time being a predetermined time, said plurality of modified visual elements having a theme that is indicative of a commonly known societal event that is associated with said predetermined time.

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47. The method of claim 46, wherein said step of monitoring real time includes monitoring a clock that is external to a processor in said gaming machine.

48. The method of claim 46, wherein said step of monitoring real time includes monitoring a clock that is internal to a processor in said gaming machine.

49. The method of claim 46, wherein both of said steps of displaying include the step of downloading data corresponding to said visual elements from a memory device.

50. The method of claim 49, wherein said steps of downloading include accessing a memory device that is external to said gaming machine.

51. The method of claim 49, wherein said steps of downloading include accessing a memory device that is internal to said gaming machine.

52. The method of claim 46, wherein said commonly known societal event is a holiday.

53. The method of claim 46, wherein said commonly known societal event is selected from a group consisting of Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mardi Gras, Easter, the 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day.

54. The method of claim 46, wherein said plurality of modified visual elements include visual elements that are selectable by said player so as to result in one of a plurality of random outcomes.

55. The method of claim 46, wherein said plurality of modified visual elements include visual elements that are non-selectable by said player.

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56.   A method of operating a gaming machine, comprising:

broadcasting a plurality of standard audio elements while said gaming machine is operating;

monitoring real time; and

broadcasting a plurality of modified audio elements in response to said real time being a predetermined time, said plurality of modified audio elements having a theme that is indicative of a commonly known societal event that is associated with said predetermined time.

57.   The method of claim 56, wherein both of said steps of broadcasting include the step of downloading data corresponding to said audio elements from a memory device.

58.   The method of claim 57, wherein said step of downloading includes accessing a memory device that is external to said gaming machine.

59.   The method of claim 57, wherein said steps of downloading includes accessing a memory device that is internal to said gaming machine.

60.   A method of operating a gaming machine, comprising:

providing a standard payout structure having a payback percentage;

monitoring real time; and

replacing, in response to said real time being a predetermined time, said standard payout structure with a modified payout structure, said modified payout structure having a payback percentage that is the same as said standard payout structure.

61.   The method of claim 60, wherein said predetermined time is a certain time period within a day.

62.   The method of claim 60, wherein said predetermined time is at least one day within a year.

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63. The method of claim 60, wherein said gaming machine has certain visual elements, said visual elements changing at said predetermined time.

64. A method of operating a gaming machine, comprising:

monitoring real time; and

replacing, in response to said real time being a predetermined time, a plurality of first payouts having a first payout frequency with a plurality of second payouts having a second payout frequency, without altering the payback percentage.

65. The method of claim 64, wherein said gaming machine has certain visual elements, and further including the step of changing said visual elements at said predetermined time.

66. The method of claim 64, wherein said step of monitoring real time includes monitoring a clock that is external to a processor in said gaming machine.

67. A gaming machine, comprising:

a processor for randomly selecting one of a plurality of outcomes of said gaming machine in response to a wager amount, said processor monitoring time signals from a clock; and

a memory device for storing at least first and second payout structures each of which dictates said plurality of outcomes, said first payout structure having higher payout amounts and a lower payout frequency than said second payout structure, said processor downloading said first payout structure in response to said processor monitoring a time signal corresponding to a first predetermined time, said processor downloading said second payout structure in response to said processor monitoring a time signal corresponding to a second predetermined time.

68. The machine of claim 67, wherein said clock is external to said gaming machine.

69. The machine of claim 67, wherein said predetermined time is a certain time period within a day.

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70.   A method of enhancing the entertainment value of a gaming machine under control of a processor, comprising:

storing a plurality of visual element data sets in a memory device to be accessed by said processor, each of said plurality of visual element data sets corresponding to a different visual element motif;

displaying each of said visual element motifs for a selected period of time on said gaming machine;

determining which one of said visual element motifs is the favorite by monitoring, with said controller, wager inputs while each of said visual element motifs is activated; and

displaying said favorite visual element motif for a larger portion of the total operating time.

71.   The method of claim 70, wherein said selected period of time is one day, and said step of monitoring wager inputs for each of said visual element motifs occurs for one day.

72.   The method of claim 70, wherein said larger portion of the total operating time is greater than 75% of any day.

73.   The method of claim 70, wherein said larger portion of the total operating time is greater than 75% of any week.

74.   The method of claim 70, wherein said different visual element motifs being monitored are all of a holiday motif.

75.   The method of claim 70, wherein said selected period of time is one week, and said step of monitoring wager inputs for each of said visual element motifs occurs for one week.

76.   The method of claim 70, further including a step of sending a signal to an external system informing said external system of said favorite visual element motif.

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77. The method of claim 70, wherein said step of determining includes receiving a signal from an external system instructing said gaming machine of said favorite visual element motif.

78. The method of claim 70, wherein said step of determining includes a first favorite visual element motif for a first time of the day and a second favorite visual element motif for a second time of the day.

79. The method of claim 70, wherein said step of determining includes a first favorite visual element motif for a first day of the week and a second favorite visual element motif for a second day of the week.

80. A method of enhancing the entertainment value of a plurality of gaming machines, each of which is linked to a common controller, comprising:

storing a plurality of visual element data sets in a memory device, each of said plurality of visual element data sets corresponding to a certain visual element motif;

5   displaying different visual element motifs on different ones of said plurality of gaming machines;

determining which one of said visual element motifs is the favorite by monitoring, with said common controller, wager inputs from each of said plurality of gaming machines; and

10   displaying said favorite visual element motif on a proportionally larger number of said plurality of gaming machines.

81. The method of claim 80, wherein said step of determining which one of said visual element motifs is the favorite includes determining a first favorite visual element motif for a first time of the day and a second favorite visual element motif for a second time of the day.

82. The method of claim 80, wherein said step of determining which one of said visual element motifs is the favorite includes determining a first favorite visual element motif for a first day of the week and a second favorite visual element motif for a second day of the week.

83. The method of claim 80, wherein said memory device is an external memory accessible via said common controller, and said step of displaying includes downloading a selected data set from said external memory.

84. The method of claim 80, wherein said step of storing includes the steps of storing said plurality of visual element data sets in a memory device located within each of said gaming machines.

85. The method of claim 80, wherein said step of monitoring with said common controller includes intermittent downloading of data regarding said favorite visual element motif.

86. The method of claim 80, wherein said step of monitoring with said common controller includes continuous downloading of data regarding said favorite visual element motif.

87. A gaming machine controlled by a processor in response to a wager, comprising:

a basic game including a plurality of possible randomly-selected basic outcomes, the plurality of possible basic outcomes including a start-bonus outcome, the basic game generating a basic game payout in response to winning ones of the basic outcomes, the start-bonus outcome having an average hit frequency defined as how often the start-bonus outcome occurs on average relative to the plurality of possible basic outcomes, the average hit frequency of the start-bonus outcome being automatically adjusted by the processor based on programmed criteria; and

a bonus feature triggered by the start-bonus outcome and generating a bonus.

88. The gaming machine of claim 87, wherein the basic game includes a plurality of symbol-bearing reels rotated and stopped to randomly place symbols on the reels in visual association with a viewable display area.

89. The gaming machine of claim 87, wherein the programmed criteria is time-based.

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90.   The gaming machine of claim 89, wherein the average hit frequency of the start-bonus outcome is automatically increased by the processor at a predetermined time.

91.   The gaming machine of claim 90, wherein said predetermined time is selected from a group consisting of a certain time of day, time of month, time of year, and a particular year.

92.   The gaming machine of claim 87, wherein the gaming machine has a payback percentage defined as the average percent of each wager that is returned to players in basic and bonus game payouts, the payback percentage of the gaming machine being kept substantially the same by the processor as the average hit frequency of the start-bonus outcome is automatically adjusted by the processor.

93.   The gaming machine of claim 87, wherein an average value of the bonus generated by the bonus feature is adjusted by the processor to compensate for the adjustments to the average hit frequency of the start-bonus outcome such that the average value of the bonus is decreased by the processor as the average hit frequency of the start-bonus outcome is increased by the processor.

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